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## ACVAGHOSHA, THE FIRST ADVOCATE OF THE MAHÂYÂNA BUDDHISM.

AÇVAGHOSHA, the first expounder of the Mahâyânistic doctrine and one of the deepest thinkers among the Buddhist patriarchs, is known to most Western Buddhist scholars simply as the author of the *Buddha-caritakâvya*,<sup>1</sup> the famous poem on the life of Buddha. The accounts of his life and of the significance of his philosophy are so few that the important influence exercised by him upon the development of the Mahâyâna Buddhism has been left almost entirely unnoticed. That he was one of the most eminent leaders among earlier Buddhists; that he was in some way or other connected with the third convocation in Kashmir, probably presided over by the Bhikshu Parçva; that he had a wonderful poetical genius which rendered great service in the propagation of Buddhism,—these facts sum up almost all the knowledge possessed by scholars about Açvaghosha. The reason why he is not known as he ought to be, is principally that the Sanskrit sources are extremely meagre, while the accounts obtainable from Chinese and Tibetan traditions are confusing and full of legends.

This fact has led Professor Kern to say that Açvaghosha was not an historical man, but a personification of Kâla, a form of Çiva.<sup>2</sup> But the sources from which the Professor draws his con-

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<sup>1</sup> *The Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XLIX. Beal's English translation of the Chinese translation "The Fo sho hing tsan king," *S. B. E.*, Vol. XIX.

<sup>2</sup> *Der Buddhismus und seine Geschichte in Indien*, authorised German translation, Leipsic, 1884, Vol. II., p. 464.

clusion are rather too meagre and I fear are not worth serious consideration. In the following pages we shall see by what traditions Açvaghosha's life is known to the Buddhists of the East.

## DATE.

Let us first decide the date, which varies according to different authorities from three hundred to six hundred years after the Parinirvâna of Buddha.

1. The *Li tai san pao chi* (*fas.* 1),<sup>1</sup> quoting the Record of the Sarvâstivâdin school, says: "Açvaghosha Bodhisattva was born a Brahman in Eastern India some three hundred years after the Nirvâna. After he abandoned his worldly life, he refuted all the doctrines held by the *tîrthakas* (heathen),<sup>2</sup> and writing the Mahâ-alamkâra-çâstra<sup>3</sup> in several hundred verses (*gâthâs*) greatly propagated the teachings of Buddha."

2. Hui-yuen<sup>4</sup> states in his commentary (*fas.* 1) on the Mahâ-prajñâ-pâramitâ-çâstra,<sup>5</sup> on the authority of Kumârajîva 鳩摩羅什 (A. D. 339-413), that Açvaghosha flourished about three hundred and seventy years after the Nirvâna.

3. In the *Life of Vasubandhu*,<sup>6</sup> Açvaghosha is mentioned as a contemporary of Kâtâyâna who is said in the same book to have been living in the fifth century after the Nirvâna.

4. The writer<sup>7</sup> of the preface to the second Chinese translation

<sup>1</sup> 歷代三寶記 (*Records of the Triratna under Successive Dynasties*), compiled by 費長房 Fe Chang-fang, A. D. 597; 15 fasciculi.

<sup>2</sup> Tîrthaka, which literally means "ascetics," was first applied to a definite sect, viz., the naked ascetics of the Jains, but was later on extended to all dissenters and has therefore been translated "heretics or heathen." The Chinese translation of the term literally means "[followers of a doctrine] other than Buddhism."

<sup>3</sup> Translated into Chinese by Kumârajîva, circa A. D. 405. 15 fasciculi.

<sup>4</sup> 慧遠 A. D. 333-416. The leader of the *Pai lien she* (White Lotus Society), first Sukhâvatî sect movement in China.

<sup>5</sup> *Treatise on the Great Wisdom-Perfection*, by Nâgârjuna. A Chinese translation by Kumârajîva, A. D. 402-405. 100 fasciculi.

<sup>6</sup> The original Sanskrit author is unknown. The present Chinese translation is by Paramârtha who came to China from Western India A. D. 546.

<sup>7</sup> The writer's name is not mentioned there, nor the date; but judging from the knowledge he shows in treating the subject, as we shall see later, he must have been living either at the time of this second translation or immediately after it.

of the Mahâyâna-çraddhotpâda-çâstra<sup>1</sup> says that this Çâstra "is the deepest of the Mahâyâna texts. Five hundred years after the Nirvâna, Açvaghosha appeared in the world. He was numbered among the four suns [of Buddhists] and his teachings stood most prominently [among the doctrines prevailing] in the five countries of India."

5. Sang-ying<sup>2</sup> states in his preface to the Chinese translation of the Mahâprajñâpâramitâçâstra that Açvaghosha appeared towards the end of the period of Orthodoxy, i. e., five hundred years after the Nirvâna.

6. The *Fu tsou t'ung chi*<sup>3</sup> (Vol. V.) says that it was the fulfilment of the Tathâgata's prophecy that six hundred years after the Nirvâna the Dharma was transmitted to Açvaghosha.

7. This six hundred year prophecy is adopted as if it were an unquestionable fact, by Fa-tsang,<sup>4</sup> a learned commentator of the Çraddhotpâdaçâstra (*Discourse on the Awakening of Faith*).

8. Chih-k'ai 智愷 who was the copyist for Paramârtha when he translated the Craddhotpâdaçâstra, also adheres to the six hundred year tradition in his preface to the book just mentioned, saying that some six hundred years after the Nirvâna of the Tathâgata, many devilish heretical leaders clamorously protested their false doctrines against the good law of Buddha, when a Çrâmana of very high virtue called Açvaghosha, thoroughly versed in the philosophy of the Mahâyâna Buddhism and highly compassionate for those ignorant people, wrote this Discourse (the Çraddhotpâdaçâstra), in order that he might increase the brilliancy of the Triratna, etc., etc.

9. The six hundred year tradition is very popular among Chinese and Japanese Buddhists. The *Fa tsu li tai tung tsai*<sup>5</sup> (fas. 5) also follows it.

<sup>1</sup> *Discourse on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahâyâna*, the principal work of Açvaghosha.

<sup>2</sup> 僧叡 A. D. 362-439. One of the four famous disciples of Kumârajîva.

<sup>3</sup> 佛祖統記 A history of Buddhism, compiled by Chih-p'an 志磐, a Chinese priest, during the latter half of the thirteenth century. 54 fasciculi.

<sup>4</sup> 643-712. A most prominent leader of the Avatamsaka sect in China.

<sup>5</sup> 佛祖歷代通載 *A History of Buddha and the Patriarchs through Successive Dynasties*, by Nien chang 念常, A. D. 1333. 36 fasciculi.

10. The prophecy above referred to (see No. 8), which is doubtless a later invention, appears in the Mahâmâyâ sūtra<sup>1</sup> (*fasciculi* 2) as follows :

“After the death of Buddha, Mahâmâyâ asked Ânanda if Buddha had ever told him in his life anything concerning the future of Buddhism. Responding to this, Ânanda said : ‘I heard one time Buddha say this with regard to the future decline of Buddhism : “After the Nirvâna Mahâkâçyapa with Ânanda will compile the Dharma-pitaka, and when it is settled Mahâkâçyapa will enter into a Nirodha-samâpatti in the *Lang chi shan* [i. e., Mount of Wolf's Track, Kukkurapadagiri], and I (Ânanda) too obtaining the fruit of enlightenment will in turn enter into Parinirvâna, when the right doctrine will be transmitted to Upagupta who will in an excellent manner teach the essence of the Dharma. . . . When five hundred years are passed [after Buddha's death] a Bhikshu named Pao-tien (Ratnadeva?) will in an excellent manner teach the essence of the Dharma, converting twenty-thousand people and causing all sentient beings in the eight creations to awaken the Anuttara-samyaksambodhicitta (most-perfect-knowledge-mind). The right doctrine will then go to decline. When six hundred years [after Buddha's death] are expired, ninety different schools of the *tîrthakas* will arise and proclaiming false doctrines, each will struggle against the other to destroy the law of Buddha. Then a Bhikshu, Açvaghosha by name, will in an excellent manner teach the essence of the Dharma and defeat all the followers of the *tîrthakas*. When seven hundred years [after Buddha's death] are expired, a Bhikshu, Nâgârjuna by name, will in an excellent manner teach the essence of the Dharma, destroying the banner of false philosophy and lighting the torch of the right doctrine.”’ . . .

11. Referring to the statement of the above mentioned Sūtra, Nâgârjuna a famous Buddhist philosopher who wrote a commentary on Açvaghosha's work, called Çraddhotpâdaçâstra, claims that

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<sup>1</sup> The Sūtra is also called the “Sūtra on Buddha's Ascent to the Trayastrimsa Heaven, to Teach the Dharma to His Mother.” 2 fasciculi. A second Chinese translation by Shih T'an-ching 釋曇景 of the Ch'i dynasty 齊 (A. D. 479-502). His nationality and life both are unknown.

there were six Aṣvaghoshas at different times, to fulfil the prophecy of Buddha and that the author of the book on which he writes a commentary<sup>1</sup> was one who appeared on earth according to the proph-

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<sup>1</sup> The Sanscritised title is the Mahâyânaçâstravyākhyâ, translated into Chinese by Pa-ti-mo-to 筏提摩多, an Indian priest, A. D. 401-2. 10 fasciculi. The statements in full run as follows :

"In all there were six Aṣvaghoshas, owing to different predictions in the sūtras ; each of them appeared to fulfil his mission according to the necessity of the time and there is no contradiction in them."

The author then proceeds to make particular references to those sūtras :

"When we examine all different predictions in the sūtras taught by Buddha through his whole life, we find six different [personages all called Aṣvaghosha]. What are those six ? (1) According to the 大乘本法契經 *Tai ch'êng pên fa ch'i ching* (Mahâyânapûrvadharmasûtra?), we have the following : When the peerless, great, enlightened, honored one was speaking about his intention of entering into Nirvâna, Aṣvaghosha rising from the seat knelt down, saluted Buddha's feet, and respectively joining his hands together turned towards Buddha, the world-honored one, and said this in verse : 'The peerless one whose heart is filled with great love and whose immeasurable virtues have been accumulated through æons which are like a boundless ocean, the Buddha, only on account of love and compassion for all sentient beings, now speaks about his entering into Nirvâna, and I and all the other members of the Saṃgha feel an unspeakable despair, utterly confused in mind and spirit. If even the world-honored one full of great love, is going to another world, leaving his own children behind him, why then could not I who am not yet full of love and compassion go to another world following Buddha's steps ? Who can blame me ?' When finished uttering these words, Aṣvaghosha gazed at the pupil of Buddha's eye and gradually passed out of life. (2) The 變化功德契經 *Pien 'hua kung tê ch'i ching* (Vikriyâpunyasûtra?) says : Then the Bhagavat said to Aṣvaghosha : 'Three hundred years after my Nirvâna thou shalt obtain an inspiration from me and with various methods (upâya) benefit and make happy all beings in coming generations. When thou dost not have any inspiration from me, thou canst not do this by thyself.' (3) The 摩訶摩耶契經 *Mahâmâyâsûtra* says as follows : 'When six hundred years are passed after the disappearance of the Tathâgata, ninety-six different schools of the *tîrthakas* will arise, and professing false doctrines, each will struggle against the other to destroy the law of Buddha. A Bhikshu called Aṣvaghosha, however, will in an excellent manner proclaim the essence of the Dharma and defeat all followers of the *tîrthakas*. (4) In the 常德三昧契經 *Ch'ang tê san mei ch'i ching* (Sûtra on the Samâdhi of Eternal Merit) we read : In the eight-hundredth year after the Nirvâna there will be a wise man, Aṣvaghosha by name. Among the followers of the *tîrthakas* as well as those of Buddhism, he will refute all those who cherish heretical views and will establish the Dharma taught by Buddha. (5) In the 摩尼清淨契經 *Mo ni ch'ing ching ch'i ching* (Maṇivimâlasûtra?) is said thus : About one hundred years after the Nirvâna of Buddha Aṣvaghosha Mahâsattva will appear on earth, protect the right doctrine and safely hoist the banner of Buddhism. (6) In the 勝頂王契經 *Shêng ting wang ch'i ching* (Çrîmûrdharâjasûtra?) is said thus : On the seventeenth day after the enlightenment of Buddha there was a *tîrthaka* called 迦羅諾鳩尸摩

ecy in the Mahâmâyâ-sûtra. Nâgârjuna even states that he was a disciple of Ačvaghosha, but the work itself is regarded as spurious, on account of some obvious contradictions, though the followers of the Mantra sect (*Shingonshyu*) insist on its genuineness because they are anxious to have an ancient authority for their own mystic doctrines, which are here supported.

Deeply absorbed in metaphysical speculation, the inhabitants of India paid very little attention to history, and whenever we endeavor to ascertain the date of important historical figures, we are sure to find our way to certainty barred. So we cannot decide which of the conflicting traditions above enumerated is to be considered as authentic. When taken independently of other historical events which are connected with them and whose dates have been already fixed, they have no value whatever. Besides it should be observed, the chronology of Buddha, to which every one of the traditions makes reference, is as yet unsettled and must have been still more so at the time when those traditions were current in India as well as in China. If they differed as to the date of Buddha, they might have maintained the same date for Ačvaghosha; no one can tell. We have to seek a light from another source.

Another group of traditions centering around Ačvaghosha is his connexion with a most powerful king of *Yüeh chih* 月氏國, who established his extensive kingdom in North-Western India. Who was this king? In the 雜寶藏經 *Tsa pao tsang ching* (Samyuktaratnapitaka-

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Chia-lo-no-chiu-shih-to (Kâlanakshita?), who transforming himself into the figure of a great *nâgarâja* (i. e., snake-king) with 86,000 heads and 86,000 tongues, simultaneously proposed 86,000 contradicting questions and asked the Tathâgata [for the solution]. He then gave him a triple answer explaining all those paradoxes. The *nâgarâja* then proposed tenfold questions again asking the Tathâgata [for their solution] to which he gave a hundredfold answer and explained their paradoxes. When this dialogue came to an end, Buddha said to the *nâgarâja*: 'Very good, very good, O Ačvaghosha Çrâmana! in order to guard the castle of the Dharma, thou hast assumed this form of destruction, establishing the doctrine of Buddha. Be patient, be patient, always discipline thyself in this way, always behave thyself in this way, do not go round in a small circle, but make a universal tour.' The *nâgarâja* then abandoning his assumed beast-form revealed his own real character and approaching the peerless, honored one and saluting him said rejoicingly in verse, etc., etc. This is the sixth Ačvaghosha."

sûtra?<sup>1</sup> *fas.* 7 we read: "A king of Tukhâra, Candana Kanishtha<sup>2</sup> (or Kanîta? Chinese 旃檀闍呢吒 *chan-tan-chi-ni-ch'a*) had a close friendship with three wise men: the first one was a Bodhisattva, called Aṣvaghosha; the second, a minister of state called Mo-cha-lo (Maṭhara or Maḍara?); the third, an experienced physician called Chê-lo-chia (Caraka). With these three the king was on most intimate terms and treated them with the utmost cordiality, permitting them to approach his person. Aṣvaghosha said [one day] to him that if he [the king] would follow his advice, he would obtain in his coming life everything that was good, eternally put an end to all his misfortunes and forever be free from evil." . . .<sup>3</sup>

Aṣvaghosha's relation with King Candana Kanishṭha (or Kanîta? Chinese *Chi-ni-ch'a*) is told also in the *Fu fa tsang yin yüan ch'uan*,<sup>4</sup> *fas.* 5:

"[At that time] the king of Tukhâra was very powerful. He was called Candana Kanishṭha (or Kanîta?, Chinese *Chi-ni-ch'a*). Being very ambitious and bold, and far superior in courage to all his contemporaries, every country he invaded was sure to be trampled down under his feet. So when he advanced his four armies

<sup>1</sup> *Sûtra on the Casket of Miscellaneous Jewels*. The original Sanskrit author is unknown. Translated into Chinese by Chi-chia-yeh (吉迦夜 Kimkara?) of the Western country and T'an-yao 曇曜, A. D. 472. 8 *fasciculi*. The original text is said to have existed at the time when the *Chêng-yüan* catalogue 貞元錄 was compiled (A. D. 785-804) by Yüan-chao 圓照, a Buddhist priest of the Tang 唐 dynasty (A. D. 618-907).

<sup>2</sup> Does Kanishṭha, which literally means "youngest," refer to the youngest of the three brothers who successively governed the Tukhâra district of India? If so, there is no question about the identity of him and King Kanishka.

<sup>3</sup> The *Fu fa tsang ch'uan* ("Transmission of the Dharmapiṭaka," *fas.* 5) also seems to refer to the same tradition, for it is stated that when a king of Tukhâra (probably, Kanishka) was very much afflicted on account of his having committed many atrocious deeds in the war with Parthia (Eastern Persia), Aṣvaghosha told him that if he would follow the Dharma with a sincere heart, his sin would gradually be attenuated; and also that the same king had a physician called Caraka "who thoroughly understood pharmacy and who was clever, learned, intelligent, elegant, meek and compassionate," etc.

<sup>4</sup> 付法藏因緣傳 "Accounts Relating to the Transmission of the Dharmapiṭaka." 6 *fasciculi*. The original Sanskrit author is unknown. The third Chinese translation now existent is by Chi-chia-yeh (Kimkara?) of the Western country, A. D. 472. The original text is said to have been existing when the *Chêng yüan* catalogue (A. D. 785-804) was compiled.



towards Pâtaliputra (*Hua shih ch'êng* in Chinese), the latter was doomed to defeat in spite of some desperate engagements. The king demanded an indemnity of 900,000,000 gold pieces, for which the defeated king offered Açvaghosha, the Buddha-bowl and a compassionate fowl, each being considered worth 300,000,000 gold pieces. The Bodhisattva Açvaghosha had intellectual powers inferior to none; the Buddha-bowl having been carried by the Tathâgata himself is full of merits; the fowl being of compassionate nature would not drink any water with worms in it,—thus all these having merits enough to keep off all enemies, they are on that account worth 900,000,000 gold pieces.<sup>1</sup> The king [of Tukhâra] was greatly pleased at receiving them and immediately withdrawing his army from the land went back to his own kingdom.”

We have the same legend stated in a brief biography<sup>2</sup> of Açvaghosha as follows :

“After that a king of the smaller *Yüeh chih* country (i. e., Tukhâra) in North India invaded the Middle country (i. e., Magadha). When the besieging had continued for some time, the king of Central India sent a message [to the invader] saying : ‘If there be anything you want, I will supply it; do not disturb the peace of my people by thus long staying here,’ to which this reply was given : ‘If you really ask a surrender, send me 300,000,000 gold pieces; I will release you.’ The [besieged] king said : ‘Even this entire kingdom cannot produce 100,000,000 gold pieces, how can I supply you with 300,000,000?’ The answer was : ‘There are in your country two great treasures, (1) the Buddha-bowl,<sup>3</sup> (2) a Bhikshu of wonderful talent (i. e., Açvaghosha). Give them to

<sup>1</sup> This is a comical feature of the legend, for if these treasures could ward off all enemies why did they not protect the unfortunate king of Pâtaliputra against Kanishtha?

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Açvaghosha* 馬鳴菩薩傳, translated into Chinese by Kumârajîva. Very short. The author is unknown. The original Sanskrit text is stated in the *Chêng yüan* catalogue to have been existing at that time. Cf. *Wassijew's Buddhismus*, German ed., p. 231 et seq.

<sup>3</sup> Fa-hien 法顯 states Kanishka (which is transliterated by him into Chinese *Chi-ni-chia* 罽膩迦, corresponding to Sanskrit Kanika) as if a different person from the king of *Yüeh chih* who invaded Gandhâra to get the Buddha-bowl. Vide Legge's translation of *Fa-hien* pp. 33 and 34.

me, they are worth 300,000,000 gold pieces.' The [besieged] king said: 'Those two treasures are what I most revere, I cannot give them up.' Thereupon the Bhikshu said to the king in explanation of the Dharma:

" 'All sentient beings are everywhere the same, while Buddhism, deep and comprehensive, aims at universal salvation, and the highest virtue of a great man consists in delivering [all] beings. As our temporal administration is very liable to meet obstructions even your rule does not extend itself outside of this one kingdom. If you on the other hand propose a wide propagation of Buddhism, you would naturally be a *Dharmarâja* over the four oceans. The duty of a Bhikshu is to save [all] the people and not to give preference to one or the other. Merits lie in our heart; truth makes no distinction. Pray be far-sighted, and do not think only of the present.'

"The king who was from the first a great admirer of him, respectfully followed his advice and delivered him to the king of *Yüeh chih* who returned with him to his own kingdom."

Comparing all these traditions, we are naturally led to the conclusion that Açvaghosha, who was numbered as one of the four suns<sup>1</sup> of Buddhism, must have had a very powerful influence over the spiritual India of the time, that the king who wished to have him as a spiritual adviser must have been a very devoted Buddhist so as to accept a Bhikshu instead of an enormous sum of money, and that such a devoted Buddhist king, ruling over the vast domain which extended from the bank of the Indus towards the lower Ganges, must have been living sometime between the third and sixth century after the Nirvâna, whatever the authentic date of Buddha might be. The next conclusion we can advance therefore will be the identification of this king who is called Candana Kanishtha or Kanîta in the above stories, with Kanishka,<sup>2</sup> the originator of the third Buddhist convocation in Kashmir.

As to the difference of the name, we have to say this. While

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<sup>1</sup> Hsüen-tsang's 玄奘, *Records of Western Countries*, Beal's English translation, Vol. II., p. 302.

<sup>2</sup> A. D. 85-106, according to M. Müller.

Hsüen-tsang's transliteration for Kanishka is *Chia-ni-shê-chia* 迦膩色迦 which is quite an approximate reproduction of the original sounds, the Chinese method of transliteration before his time by the so-called "old translators" was rather irregular, loose and therefore often misleading. Add to this the liability to error on the part of local dialects, and we do not improperly identify *Chi-ni-ch'a*, with Kanishka, while the former may be Sanskritised Kanishṭha or Kanīta.<sup>1</sup>

In further support of this view, we quote from the *Journal of the Buddhist Text Society*, Vol. I., Part 3, an article on King Kanishka, taken from a Tibetan source, which bears a more historical appearance than the legends above referred to. The abstract is:

"Kanishka, king of Palhâva and Delhi,<sup>2</sup> was born four hundred years after the Nirvâna. When he learned that Simha, king of Kashmir, abandoned the worldly life to become a Buddhist priest under the name of Sudarçana and obtained Arhatship, he went to Kashmir and heard a sermon delivered by Sudarcana.<sup>3</sup> At that

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<sup>1</sup> One objection to identifying Chi-ni-ch'a 罽泥吒 (Kanishṭha or Kanīta) with Kanishka 迦膩色迦 is a single Chinese character appearing in the Mahâlamkāra-çâstra ("Book of Great Glory"), the work ascribed to Açvaghosha. In *fas.* 3 as well as *fas.* 6 of the same book referring to Candana Kanishṭha or Kanīta, the writer says: "我昔嘗聞旃檀罽泥吒 *Wo hsi ch'ang wên, chan-t'an chi-ni-ch'a wang,*" i. e., "I heard of old that King Candana Kanishṭha," etc. (in *fas.* 6., *chia-ni-ch'a*), etc., etc. The Chinese character *hsi* usually means "of yore" or "in olden times," but it also signifies the past indefinitely, near as well as distant. If we thus understand the term in the sense of "some time ago," or simply "once," there will be no difficulty in demonstrating that Açvaghosha was an elder contemporary of Kanishka, though we cannot apparently accept the Chinese tradition which says they were intimately known to each other. Because in that case Açvaghosha would not refer to the king in such a hearsay manner as stated in the book above mentioned. Taking all in all, this does not prevent us asserting that they were contemporaneous.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. A. Schiefner's German translation of Târanâtha's *History of Buddhism*, p. 89: "Nachdem König Çrîschandra die Herrschaft ausgetübt hatte, waren viele Jahre vergangen, als im Westen im Lande *Tili* und *Mâlava* ein an Jahren junger König Kanika in die Herrschaft gewählt wurde."

<sup>3</sup> Târanâtha's statement differs from this. According to him Kanika and Kanishka are not the same king, the former being that of Tili and Mâlava, while the latter that of Jâlamdhara. *Vide* pp. 58 and 90. Târanâtha might have confused them.

time a Mahâyâna priest who kept a most prominent position in northern countries was called Açvaghosha. His influence in the spiritual world was as incomparable as the temporal power of Kanishka who conquered Kashmir and Jâlamdhara. The king sent a message to Açvaghosha to come to his kingdom, who, however, owing to his old age, could not accept the invitation, but sent him a leading disciple of his called Jñânayaça, accompanied with a letter treating the essential points of Buddhism."<sup>1</sup>

Though the Tibetan tradition considerably differs in many respects from the Chinese accounts above mentioned, they both agree in this point that Açvaghosha and Kanishka had some intercourse, or that at least they were contemporaneous and known to each other. So we may take it as an established fact that Açvaghosha, the author of the 大乘起信論 Mahâyâna-çraddhotpâda-çâstra (*Discourse on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahâyâna*), was living at the time of Kanishka.<sup>2</sup>

I do not think there is any need here to enumerate all different opinions about the time of Kanishka, which has been already approximately fixed by the untiring investigation of European scholars, such as Princep, Lassen, Cunningham, Wilson, Fergusson, Max Müller, and others.<sup>3</sup> So long as our present aim is to assign the time of Açvaghosha more definitely than stating vaguely some three or five hundred years after the Nirvâna of Buddha, suffice it to say that he lived at the time extending from the latter half of the first century before Christ to about 50 or 80 A. D. If we fix the date of Buddha's death in the fifth century before Christ, Açvaghosha must be said to have lived mostly during the six hundredth year

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<sup>1</sup> Târanâtha also states this event (*Geschichte des Buddhismus*, p. 92). But the king is not Kanishka, but Kanika; and the name of the disciple is not Jñânayaça, but *Dschânakriya*.

<sup>2</sup> A further corroboration of this view will be met with when we treat later on of the conversion of Açvaghosha by Parçva or his disciple Puṇyayaças.

<sup>3</sup> Max Müller's opinion, as stated before, is that Kanishka lived A. D. 85-106; Lassen thinks the Gondopharean dynasty was succeeded by Kanishka, king of the *Yüeh chih*, about one hundred years before Christ; Princep places his reign during the first century A. D.; Cunningham thinks his consecration was 58 A. D., Fergusson, 79 A. D.; Rhys Davids, about 10 A. D., etc.

after the Nirvâna. At the very most his time cannot be placed later than the first century of the Christian era.

I have spared no pains, even at the risk of tediousness, in gathering all the information obtainable from Chinese sources relative to the date of Açvaghosha, because this date is of paramount importance when we enter into the discussion of the development of the Mahâyâna Buddhism, which is commonly and erroneously considered to be the sole work of Nâgârjuna.

#### NATIVITY AND PEREGRINATION.

There is not so much discordance in the traditions about the wanderings of Açvaghosha as about his date, though indeed we do not have as yet any means of ascertaining his birth-place, other than the statements of discordant authorities. According to Târanâtha,<sup>1</sup> he was a son of a rich Brahman called Samghaguhya who married the tenth and youngest daughter of a merchant in Khorta. As a youth, when thoroughly familiar with every department of knowledge, he went to Odiviça, Gaura, Tîrahuti, Kâmarûpa, and some other places, defeating everywhere his Buddhist opponents by his ingenious logic.

All these places are situated in Eastern India, and among the Chinese traditions the "Record of the Triratna" (*Li tai san pao chi*) as well as the "Accounts of Buddha and the Patriarchs" (*Fo tsu tung chi*) agree with Târanâtha in placing Açvaghosha's native land in the East; but the *Life of Vasubandhu* makes Açvaghosha a native of Bhâshita in Çrâvastî, while in Nâgârjuna's work, the Mahâyâna-çâstravyâkhyâ 釋摩訶衍論 (*Shih mo ho yen lun*), he is mentioned as having been born in Western India, Loka being the father and Ghoṇâ the mother. The "Record of Buddha and the Patriarchs Under Successive Dynasties" (*Fo tsu li tai t'ung tsai*) agrees with neither of the above statements, for it says (*fas.* 5): "The twelfth patriarch, Açvaghosha Mahâsattva (the great man), was a native of Vârâṇasî." A further contradicting tradition is pointed out by Prof. S. Murakami in one of his articles on the history of Buddhism,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Geschichte des Buddhismus*, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup>The *Bukkyô Shirin*, Vol. I., No. 6. 1894. Tokyo, Japan.

quoting the *Shittanzô* 悉曇藏 (*fas.* 1), which makes Aṣvaghosha a man of South India.

A majority of the traditions place his native country in East India; but there is no means of confirming these. One thing, however, seems to be certain, namely, that Aṣvaghosha was not born in the northern part of India, which place is supposed by most Western Buddhist scholars to be the cradle of the Mahâyâna school.

Wherever the native country of Aṣvaghosha may have been, both the Chinese and Tibetan records agree that he made a journey to Central India, or Magadha. It seems that every intellectual man in India, the people of which, living in affluence, were not occupied with the cares of making a living, sought to gain renown by dialectics and subtle reasonings, and Aṣvaghosha, as a Brahman whose "intellectual acquirements were wonderfully deep," and whose "penetrating insight was matchless,"<sup>1</sup> could not resist the temptation. Not satisfied with his intellectual campaign against commonplace Buddhists in his neighborhood, who were crushed down as "rotten wood before a raging hurricane,"<sup>2</sup> he went, according to a Chinese tradition, to Pâṭaliputra, and according to the Tibetan, to Nâlanda. The *Life of Aṣvaghosha* evidently refers to this fact when it states that Pârçva, the eleventh patriarch and eventual teacher of Aṣvaghosha, on being informed of the paramount influence of the Brahman *tirthaka* (i. e., Aṣvaghosha) in Central India and of the fact that his conquest over Buddhists had silenced the bell (*ghanta*) in some monastery (*vihdra*), journeyed from Northern India to convert the bitterest opponent into a faithful follower of Buddha. He adds that Aṣvaghosha left his home and lived henceforth in Central India. But according to the "Transmission of the Dharmapitaka" (*Fu fa tsang ch'uan*, *fas.* 5) we find Aṣvaghosha even after his conversion still in Pâṭaliputra, from which he was taken by King Kanishka to the latter's own capital, Gandhâra, in the Northwest of India.

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<sup>1</sup> The "Transmission of the Dharmapitaka" (*Fu fa tsang ch'uan*, *fas.* 5).

<sup>2</sup> The same as above.

Thus all that we can say about the birth-place and wandering of Açvaghosha is: (1) he was a Brahman by birth either of South, or of West, or of East, but not of North India; (2) he acquired in Central India his highest reputation as a Brahman disputant, and, after his conversion, as the greatest Buddha-follower of the time, intellectually as well as morally; (3) his later life was spent according to the Chinese authority in the North where he wrote probably the Mahâlamkâra-sûtraçâstra ("Book of Great Glory") which describes matters mostly relating to Western India.

#### APPELLATIONS.

The author of the Mahâyânaçraddhotpâdaçâstra ("Discourse on the Awakening of Faith in the Mahâyâna") is most commonly known in the Chinese Buddhist literature by the name of Açvaghosha. But according to his *Life* he was also called Kung-tê-jih 功德日 (i. e., merit-sun; in Sanskrit, Puṇyaditya?). For he was not only a philosopher, but a preacher and an organiser, for "while in North India he widely propagated the doctrine of Buddha, led and benefited the masses, and through good and excellent [missionary] methods perfected the merits of the people." The *Record of Buddha and the Patriarchs (Fo tsou t'ung tsai)*, where it is stated that his other name was Kung-chang 功勝 (Puṇyaçrîka?), can be said almost to agree with the above. While thus no other name or appellation of his is known in China, Târanâtha mentions nine more names: Kâla (Time), Durdarsha (Hard-to-be-seen), Durdarsha-kâla (Hard-to-be-seen-time), Mâtrceta (Mother-child), Pitrceta (Father-child), Çûra (Hero), Dharmika-Subhûti (Virtuous-Mighty), and Maticitra (Intelligence-bright).<sup>1</sup>

In I-tsing's "Correspondence from the South Sea" (*Nan hai chi kwei ch'uan*,<sup>2</sup> Chap. 32, "On Chanting"), the name Mâtrceta is mentioned, but I-tsing does not identify him with Açvaghosha, though the legend attached to the former closely resembles that of the lat-

<sup>1</sup> *Geschichte des Buddhismus*, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> 南海寄歸傳 by I-tsing 義淨 who left China A. D. 671 for a pilgrimage to India and came back A. D. 695. The book is a work on the *vinaya* as observed by the Sarvâstivâdin, which the pilgrim witnessed in India as well as in Ceylon. An English translation by J. Takakusu, London.

ter told in Târanâtha. Târanâtha states that when Aṣvaghosha became a *sthavira* and advocate of the Tripitaka, he had a dream one night in which the venerable Târâ gave him the instruction to write hymns on Buddha for the expiation of his former sinful deeds; that according to this admonition he wrote many hymns praising the virtues of Buddha, amongst which one containing one hundred and fifty ḡlokas<sup>1</sup> is the best of all; that the hymns composed by him are full of benediction like the very words of Buddha, because he was predicted by the Blessed One to be a hymnist.<sup>2</sup>

Compare the above with this from I-tsing :

“The venerable Mâtṛceta (Mother-child) was a man of great intellect, of excellent virtue, eminently standing above all sages in India. A tradition says that when Buddha was taking a walk one time with his kinsmen, disciples, and many other people, a nightingale (?), observing his personal feature as elegant and majestic as a gold mountain, uttered in the wood some pleasant, harmonious notes that sounded like praising the virtues of Buddha. Buddha then turning towards the disciples said: ‘The bird overcome by the joy of seeing me utters a pitiful cry. By this merit it will after my death obtain a human form, Mâtṛceta 摩哩制吒 by name, and praise and adore my intrinsic virtues with a number of hymns.’ This man first followed the doctrine of a *tīrthaka* worshipping Maheṣvara<sup>3</sup> and composed many hymns to adore him. But in the meantime he came across his own name recorded [in a Buddhist writing]; inspired by this, he took refuge in Buddha, changed his garb, abandoned his laymanship, and in many ways praised, honored and adored Buddha. Regretting his misbehavior in the past and desiring to perform good deeds in the future and also lamenting the unfortunate fate that prevented him from having a personal interview with the Great Teacher rather than bowing before his bequeathed image, he at last decided with all his rhetorical talent and

<sup>1</sup> Schiefner notes: “Çatapantschâḡatika nâma stotra, Tandjur B. I, unter den Stotra’s.”

<sup>2</sup> *Geschichte des Buddhismus*, p. 91.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the following statement in Târanâtha, p. 90: “Als er (Aṣvaghosha) in den Mantra- und Tantra-Formeln und in der Dialektik sehr bewandert wurde, gab ihm Maheṣvara selbst Anleitung.”



in solemn fulfilment of the Lord's prophecy, to praise his virtues and merits [in hymns]. He first composed four hundred çlokas (verses) and then one hundred and fifty çlokas;<sup>1</sup> all of which describe the six Pâramitâs [Perfections] and state the excellent virtues possessed by the World-Honored-One," etc.

At the end of the same Chapter (i. e., Chap. 32) in I-tsing's Correspondence he refers to Açvaghosha and Nâgârjuna both of whom composed some beautiful and popular hymns that were sung by Buddhists throughout India at the time of his pilgrimage. But if the Tibetan statement is reliable, I-tsing may have been mistaken in recording Açvaghosha and Mâtreceta as different characters. The Tibetan and Chinese version of the one hundred and fifty cloka hymn being still existent, the comparison of which, however, I have not yet been able to make, will furnish an interesting testimony for the identification.

Many legendary explanations have been invented about the name of Açvaghosha, as might be expected of the imaginative Indian mind, but not being worth while quoting from the materials at my command, no reference will be made to them here.

#### CONVERSION.

A consensus of traditions both Tibetan and Chinese maintains that Açvaghosha was in his earlier life a most powerful adherent of Brahmanism, though we are tempted to discredit it on the ground that later Buddhist writers may have wished to exaggerate the superiority of Buddhism to all other Indian philosophical and religious doctrines, by chronicling the conversion of one of its strongest opponents to their side. Whatever the origin of the legend may be, how did his conversion take place? By whom was he converted? About these points the Tibetan and the Chinese tradition by no means agree, the one standing in a direct contradiction to the other. While the Tibetan account is full of mystery and irra-

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<sup>1</sup> "Hymn of One Hundred and Fifty Çlokas" (Çatapañcâśhad-buddhastotra), translated into Chinese by I-tsing during his stay in the Nâlanda-vihâra, Central India. At the time of the compilation of the *Chêng yüan* catalogue the original is said to have existed.

tionality, the Chinese is natural enough to convince us of its probable occurrence.

According to Târanâtha<sup>1</sup> Âryadeva, the most eminent disciple of Nâgârjuna, defeated and proselyted Aṣvaghosha,<sup>2</sup> not by his usual subtlety in dialectics, but by the superiority of his magical arts. Aṣvaghosha made use of every tantric formula he could command, in order to free himself from the enchantment in which he was held by his enemy, but all to no purpose whatever. Thus when he was in an utterly desperate condition, he happened to read the Buddhist Sûtra which was kept in his place of confinement and in which he found his destiny prophesied by Buddha,<sup>3</sup> he was seized with deep regrets for his former hostile attitude toward the Dharma, and immediately renouncing his tîrthakism, professed the doctrine of Çâkyamuni.

The Tibetan tradition presents some unmistakable indications of a later invention : the use of tantric formulæ, the so-called prophecy of the Tathâgata, and the anachronism of Âryadeva. On the other hand the Chinese records are worth crediting, though they are not unanimous as to how the conversion took place and who was the proselytist.

According to the *Life of Aṣvaghosha*, Parçva<sup>4</sup> was the man who converted him. They agreed at their first meeting that on the seventh day thence they should have the king, ministers, Çrâmanas, tîrthakas and all great teachers of the Dharma gathered in the *Vihdra* and have their discussion there before all those people. "In the sixth night the sthavira entered into a *samādhi* and meditated on what he had to do [in the morning]. When the seventh day dawned, a great crowd was gathered like clouds. The Sthavira Parçva arrived first and ascended a high platform with an unusually pleasant

<sup>1</sup> *Geschichte des Buddhismus*, German translation by Schiefner, pp. 84-85.

<sup>2</sup> He is mentioned there by the name of Durdarshakâla.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. this with the accounts of Mâtṛceṭa-Aṣvaghosha told in I-tsing.

<sup>4</sup> The conversion of Aṣvaghosha by Parçva as here stated may be considered an addition to the proof already demonstrated for the contemporaneousness of Aṣvaghosha and King Kanishka ; for Parçva, according to the Tibetan as well as the Chinese authority, was a co-operator at least, if not the president, of the third Buddhist convocation promoted by the king of Kashmir.

countenance. The *tīrthaka* [i. e., Açvaghosha] came later and took a seat opposite him. When he observed the çrâmana with a pleasant countenance and in good spirits, and when he also observed his whole attitude showing the manner of an able opponent, he thought: 'May he not be Bhikshu Chin? His mind is calm and pleasant, and besides he bears the manner of an able antagonist. We shall indeed have an excellent discussion to-day.'

"They then proposed the question how the defeated one should be punished. The *tīrthaka* (Açvaghosha) said: 'The defeated one shall have his tongue cut out.' The sthavira replied 'No, he shall become a disciple [of the winner] as the acknowledgement of defeat.' The *tīrthaka* then replied: 'Let it be so,' and asked, 'Who will begin the discussion?' The Sthavira Parçva said: 'I am more advanced in age; I came from afar for the purpose [of challenging you]; and moreover I was here this morning earlier than you. So it will be most natural for me to speak first.' The *tīrthaka* said: 'Let it be so. Following the subject of your argument I shall completely baffle you.'

"The Sthavira Parçva then said: 'What shall we have to do, in order to keep the kingdom in perfect peace, to have the king live long, to let the people enjoy abundance and prosperity, all free from evils and catastrophies?' The *tīrthaka* was silent, not knowing what to reply. As now according to the rule of discussion one who could not make a response is defeated, Açvaghosha was obliged to bow [before the opponent] as a disciple of his. He had his head shaved, was converted to a çrâmana, and instructed in the perfection-precepts.

"When he (Açvaghosha) was alone in his room, he was absorbed in gloomy, unpleasant reflexion as to why he, possessing a bright intellect and far-sighted discretion, and having his reputation widely spread all over the world, could be defeated with a single question and be made a disciple of another. Parçva well knew his mind and ordered him to come to his room where the master manifested himself in several supernatural transformations. Açvaghosha now fully recognised that his master was not a man of ordinary

type, and thus feeling happy and contented, thought it his duty to become one of his disciples.

“The master told him : ‘Your intellect is bright enough, hard to find its equal ; but it wants a final touch. If you study the doctrine I have mastered, attend to my capability and insight into the Bodhi, and if you become thoroughly versed in the method of discussion and clearly understand the principle of things, there will be no one who can match you in the whole world.’

“The master returned to his own country [North India]; the disciple remained in Central India, making an extensive study of the Sûtras, seeking a clear comprehension of the doctrine, Buddhist as well as non-Buddhist. His oratorical genius swept everything before him and he was reverentially honored by the four classes of the people, including the king of [Central] India who treated him as a man of distinction.”

According to the “Transmission of the Dharmapitaka” (*Fu fa tsang chuan*), however, Aṣvaghosha was not converted by Parvā, but by his disciple and patriarchal successor, Puṇyayaśas. Though the two works, *Life of Aṣvaghosha* and the book just mentioned differ in some other points, they are evidently two different versions of the one original legend. As the book is not as yet accessible to English readers, I here produce the whole matter translated from the Chinese version. The comparison will prove interesting.

“Full of a proud and arrogant spirit that speedily grew like a wild plant, he [Aṣvaghosha] firmly believed in the existence of an ego-entity and cherished the ultra-egotistic idea. Being informed that an *Ācārya* called Puṇyayaśas, who, deep in knowledge and wide in learning, proclaimed that all things are relative [= *çūnya*, lit. empty], there is no *ātman*, no *pudgala*; Aṣvaghosha’s arrogant spirit asserted itself, and presenting himself to Puṇyayaśas challenged him saying : ‘I confute all [false] opinions and doctrines in the world, as hailstones strike tender grass. If my declaration prove false and not true, I will have my own tongue cut out in acknowledgement of defeat.’ Thereupon Puṇyayaśas explained to him that Buddhism distinguishes two kinds of truth, that while ‘practical truth’ hypothetically admits the existence of an *ātman*, there is

nothing conditional in 'pure [or absolute] truth,' all being calm and tranquil, and that therefore we cannot prove the ego as an absolute entity.

"Açvaghosha would not yet surrender himself, because being over-confident of his own intellectual power, he considered himself to have gained the point. Puṇyayaças said: 'Carefully think of yourself; tell not a lie. We will see which of us has really won.'

"Açvaghosha meanwhile came to think that while 'practical truth' being only conditional has no reality at all, 'pure truth' is calm and tranquil in its nature, and that therefore these two forms of truth are all unobtainable, and that if they have thus no actuality (or existence?), how could they be refuted [as false]?<sup>1</sup> So feeling now the superiority of his opponent, he tried to cut out his tongue in acknowledgement of the defeat. But Puṇyayaças stopped him saying: 'We teach a doctrine of love and compassion, and do not demand that you cut out your tongue. Have your head shaved instead and be my disciple.' Açvaghosha thus converted was made a çrâmana by Puṇyayaças.

"But Açvaghosha who felt extremely ashamed of his [former] self-assumption was thinking of attempting his own life. Puṇyayaças, however, attaining arhatship, entered into a *samddhi* and divined what was going on in the mind of Açvaghosha. He ordered him to go and bring some books out of the library. Açvaghosha said to the *Âcarya*: 'The room is perfectly dark; how can I get in there?' To this Puṇyayaças answered: 'Just go in, and I shall let you have light.' Then the *Âcarya* through his supernatural power stretched far into the room his right hand whose five fingers each radiating with light illuminated everything inside of the walls. Açvaghosha thought it a mental hallucination and knowing the fact that a hallucination as a rule disappears when one is conscious of it, he was surprised to see the light glowing more and more. He

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<sup>1</sup> The reasoning is somehow unintelligible. The passages must be defective, and although I might venture to supply the necessary words to make them more logical and intelligible to the general reader who is not acquainted with the cûnyatâ philosophy, I have not tried to do so, thinking that it is enough here if we see in what the subject of the discussion consisted.

tried his magical arts to extinguish it till he felt utterly exhausted, for the mysterious light suffered no change whatever. Finally coming to realise that it was the work of no other person than his teacher, his spirit was filled with remorse, and he thenceforth applied himself diligently to religious discipline and never relapsed."<sup>1</sup>

The "Record of Buddha and the Patriarchs" (*Fo tsou tung tsai*) agrees with the "Transmission of the Dharmapiṭaka" (*Fu fa tsang chuan*) in making Puṇyayaças, instead of Parçva, the master of the conversion. But the former does not state how Aṣvaghosha was converted.

Though so far it remains an open question who was the real master of Aṣvaghosha, we can be sure of this, that he had intimate spiritual communication with both Parçva and Puṇyayaças. Parçva who was an older contemporary of Puṇyayaças, was probably already advanced in age when Aṣvaghosha came to be personally acquainted with him, and so he did not have time enough to lead the young promising disciple to a consummate understanding of the doctrine of Buddha. After the demise of this venerable old patriarch, Aṣvaghosha therefore had to go to Puṇyayaças for a further study of his religion, till he was capable of forming his own original thoughts, which are set forth in his principal work, the "Discourse of the Awakening of Faith" (Çraddhotpâda-Çâstra). This assumption is justified when we notice that Aṣvaghosha in the "Book of Great Glory" pays his homage to Parçva as well as to Puṇyayaças.

Now by way of a supplementary note to the above, let us say a word about Wassiljew's observation<sup>2</sup> which states that while Hînayânists or Çrâvakas ascribe the conversion of Aṣvaghosha to Parçva, the Mahâyânistic record says that Âryadeva converted him. This assertion is evidently incorrect, for the *Life of Aṣvaghosha* as well as the "Transmission of the Dharmapiṭaka" (*Fu fa tsang chuan*) in which the honor of his conversion is given to the successor of Parçva as aforesaid, do not certainly belong to the work of

<sup>1</sup> The "Transmission of the Dharmapiṭaka" (*Fu fa tsang chuan*), fas. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Buddhismus*, German ed., p. 222, and also see Târanâtha, tr. by Schiefner, p. 311.

the Hînayâna school. It is the Tibetan tradition only, and not the general Mahâyânist statement that Âryadeva converted Açvaghosha, and there is no ground at all for the assertion of Wassiljew, which practically leads us to take everything Tibetan for Mahâyânistic and everything Chinese for Hînayânistic.

## LISTS OF PATRIARCHS.

The incorrectness of the Tibetan story, as to the conversion of Açvaghosha by Âryadeva above referred to, is further shown by a list of the Buddhist patriarchs in India appearing in various Buddhist books either translated from Sanskrit into Chinese or compiled in China from sundry sources. In every one of them Açvaghosha is placed after Parçva or Puṇyayaças, and before both Nâgârjuna and Âryadeva, the most brilliant disciple of the former. The following list therefore as we noticed elsewhere will furnish

	THE FO TSU T'UNG TSAI	THE FO TSU T'UNG CHI	THE FU FA TSANG CHUAN	BUDDHABHADRA <sup>1</sup>	SARVASTI-VADIN
1	Mahâkâçyapa	Mahâkâçyapa	Mahâkâçyapa	Ânanda	Mahâkâçyapa
2	Ânanda	Ânanda	Ânanda	Madhyântika	Ânanda
3	Çaṇavâsa	Çaṇavâsa	Çaṇavâsa	Çaṇavâsa	Madhyântika
4	Upagupta	Upagupta	Upagupta	Upagupta	Çaṇavâsa
5	Dr̥taka	Dr̥taka	Dr̥taka	Kâtyâyana	Upagupta
6	Micchaka	Micchaka	Micchaka	Vasumitra	Maitreya
7	Vasumitra	Buddhanandi	Buddhanandi	Kṛshṇa	Kâtyâyana
8	Buddhânandi	Buddhamitra	Buddhamitra	Parçva	Vasumitra
9	Buddhamitra	Parçva	Parçva	Açvaghosha	Kṛshṇa
10	Parçva	Puṇyayaças	Puṇyayaças	Ghosha	Parçva
11	Puṇyayaças	Açvaghosha	Açvaghosha	. . . . .	Açvaghosha
12	Açvaghosha	Kapi	Kapimala		Kumârata
13	Kapimala	Nâgârjuna	Nâgârjuna		. . . . .
14	Nâgârjuna	Nâgârjuna	. . . . .		
15	Kanadeva (Âryadeva)	Kanadeva			
..	. . . . .	. . . . .			
34					Nâgârjuna
35					Deva
..					. . . . .

<sup>1</sup> He was a native of Kapilavastu and came to China A. D. 406. A translator of many Sanskrit works. His list belongs to the Sarvâstivâdin, though it is a little different from the succeeding one. The former contains fifty-four and the latter fifty-three patriarchs. See the *C'hu san tsang chi chi* 出三藏記集 by 僧祐 (Nanjo's Catalogue, No. 1476).

us good material for fixing the time of Aṣvaghosha. It does not make any practical difference whether he was converted by Parçva himself or his immediate successor and disciple Puṇyayaças, because it is most probable they all were contemporaneous. The list generally gives twenty-three or twenty-eight patriarchs beginning with Mahâkâçyapa, but not deeming it necessary to give a complete list, I have cut it short at Deva.

Chieh-sung<sup>1</sup> refutes in his *Chuan fa chang tsung lun* 傳法正宗論 (A Treatise on the Right Transmission of the Dharma) the authority of the "Transmission of the Dharmapitaka" (*Fu fa tsang chuan*) but he agrees with it down to the seventeenth patriarch. The principal point of his refutation is simply that Bodhidharma, the founder of the Chinese Dhyâna school, should be included in the list.

#### AS AN ARTIST.

We cannot conclude the accounts concerning Aṣvaghosha without mentioning an anecdote from a Chinese source.<sup>2</sup> The Çraddotpâdaçâstra ("The Awakening of Faith,") proves he was a philosopher of a high grade; the Buddhacaritakâvya ("The Life of Buddha") and the Mahâlamkaraçâstra ("The Book of Great Glory") reveal his poetical genius; and the following story indicates that he was a musician:<sup>3</sup>

"He [Aṣvaghosha] then went to Pâtaliputra for his propaganda-tour, where he composed an excellent tune called *Lai cha huo lo* (賴吒和囉 Râstavara?), that he might by this means convert the people of the city. Its melody was classical, mournful, and melodious, inducing the audience to ponder on the misery,

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<sup>1</sup> 智昇 a priest of the Dhyâna school who died A. D. 1071 or 1072. He wrote among other works one on the fundamental identicalness of Confucianism and Buddhism.

<sup>2</sup> The "Transmission of the Dharmapitaka" (*Fu fa tsang chuan*, fas. 5).

<sup>3</sup> The fact agrees well with Târanâtha's statement which in its German translation reads as follows: "Die von ihm verfassten Loblieder sind auch in allen Ländern verbreitet; da zuletzt Sänger und Possenreisser dieselben vortrugen und bei allen Menschen des Landes mit Macht Glauben an den Buddha entstand, erwuchs durch die Loblieder grösserer Nutzen zur Verbreitung der Lehre." *Geschichte des Buddhismus*, German tr., p. 91.



emptiness, and non-âtman-ness of life. That is to say, the music roused in the mind of the hearer the thought that all aggregates are visionary and subject to transformation ; that the triple world is a jail and a bondage, with nothing enjoyable in it ; that since royalty, nobility, and the exercise of supreme power, are all characterised with transitoriness, nothing can prevent their decline, which will be as sure as the dispersion of the clouds in the sky ; that this corporeal existence is a sham, is as hollow as a plantain tree, is an enemy, a foe, one not to be intimately related with ; and again that like a box in which a cobra is kept, it should never be cherished by anybody ; that therefore all Buddhas denounce persons clinging to a corporeal existence. Thus explaining in detail the doctrine of the non-âtman and the *çûnyatâ*, Açvaghosha had the melody played by musicians, who, however, not being able to grasp the significance of the piece, failed to produce the intended tune and harmony. He then donned a white woolen dress, joined the band of musicians, beating the drum, ringing the bell, and tuning the lyre, and this done, the melody in full perfection gave a note at once mournful and soothing, so as to arouse in the mind of the audience the idea of the misery, emptiness, and non-âtman-ness of all things. The five hundred royal princes in the city thus moved all at once were fully awakened, and abhorring the curse of the five evil passions abandoned their worldly life and took refuge in the Bodhi. The king of Pâtaliputra was very much terrified by the event, thinking that if the people who listen to this music would abandon their homes [like the princes], his country would be depopulated and his royal business ruined. So he warned the people never to play this music hereafter."

#### WORKS IN CHINESE TRANSLATIONS.

The works ascribed to Açvaghosha and still existing in Chinese translations are eight in number. They are : (1) The 大乘起信論 *Tai shêng ch'i hsin lun* (Mahâyânaçraddhotpâdaçâstra): discourse on the awakening of faith in the Mahâyâna. It is the principal work of Açvaghosha, and through this we are able to recognise

what an important position he occupies in the development of the Mahâyânistic world-conception and theory of final emancipation. Its outlines and the accounts of its Chinese translation will be given below. (2) The 大宗地玄文本論 *Ta sung ti hsüan wên pên lun*, a fundamental treatise on the spiritual stages for reaching final deliverance. The book has a decided tendency to mysticism, explaining a gradual development of religious consciousness through fifty-one different spiritual stages. It may be considered a precursory work out of which Vajrabodhi's Mantrism finally made a full manifestation. It was translated by Paramârtha between A. D. 557-569. Twenty *fasciculi*, forty chapters. (3) The 大莊嚴論經 *Ta chuang yen lun ching* (Mahâlamkârasûtraçâstra), the Book of Great Glory, or a compilation of stories illustrating the retribution of karma. The stories relate mostly to the events that occurred in Western India. Beal translated some of them in his *Buddhist Literature in China*. The Chinese translator is Kumârajîva, circa A. D. 405. Fifteen *fasciculi*. (4) The 佛所行讚 *Fo shu hing tsan* (Buddhacaritakâvya), a well known poem on the life of Buddha. The Chinese translation is by Dharmaraksha between A. D. 414-421. Five *fasciculi*, twenty-eight chapters. Beal's English translation forms Vol. XIX. of *The Sacred Books of the East*; and Cowell's translation from Sanskrit, Vol. XLIX of the same. (5) The 尼乾子問無我義經 *Ni kan tzü wên wu wu i ching*, a sûtra on a Nirgrantha's asking about the theory of non-ego. The book foreshadows the Mâdhyamika philosophy of Nâgârjuna, for the two forms of truth are distinguished there, Pure truth (*Paramârtha-satya*) and Practical Truth (*Samvrtti-satya*),<sup>1</sup> and the *Çûnyatâ* theory also is proclaimed. (6) The 十不善業道經 *Shih pu shan yeh tao ching*, a sûtra on the ten no-good deeds. (7) The 事師法五十頌 *Shih shih fa wu shih sung*, fifty verses on the rules of serving a master or teacher. (8) The *Lu tao lun 'hui ching*, a sûtra on transmigration through the six states of existence. These last four works are very short, all translated by Jih-ch'êng (Divayaças?), between A. D. 1004-1058.

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<sup>1</sup> Notice Açvaghosha's discussion with Punyayaças as above mentioned.

## CHINESE TRANSLATIONS OF THE "DISCOURSE ON THE AWAKENING OF FAITH."

Let us give here some remarks on the Chinese translations of Açvaghosha's, principal and best known work "The Awakening of Faith." The Sanskrit original is long lost, probably owing to the repeated persecutions of Buddhism by Chinese emperors at different times. According to the *Chéng yüan* catalogue 貞元錄 (compiled between A. D. 785-804) the Sanskrit text is said to have existed at that time. It is a great pity that such an important Buddhist philosophical work as the present çâstra can be studied only through translations.

There are two Chinese translations still existing in the tripitaka collection. The first translation was made by Paramârtha (波羅末陀), otherwise called Kulanâtha (狗羅那陀), of Ujjayana (or Ujjayini, modern Oujein) in Western India. He came to China A. D. 546 and died A. D. 569 when he was 71 years old. Among many other translations, the present one came from his pen on the tenth day of September, A. D. 554.

The second one is by Çikshânanda (實叉難陀), of Kusutana (Khoten), who began his work on the eighth of October, A. D. 700. He died in China A. D. 710 at the age of 59.

As to the problem whether the original of the two Chinese translations is the same or different, my impression is that they were not the same text, the one having been brought from Ujjayana and the other from Khoten. But the difference, as far as we can judge from the comparison of the two versions, is not fundamental.

In the preface to the second translation of the *Kao li* edition, the unknown writer states to the following effect: The present Câstra has two translations. The first one is by Paramârtha and the second one is from the Sanskrit text brought by Çikshânanda who found also the older Sanskrit original in the *Tz'u an* tower. As soon as he had finished the rendering of the Avatamsakasûtra into Chinese, he began a translation of his own text with the assistance of several native Buddhist priests. The new translation occa-

sionally deviates from the older one, partly because each translator had his own views and partly because the texts themselves were not the same.

Though the *Chéng yüan* 貞元錄 as well as the *K'ai yüan*<sup>1</sup> 開元錄 catalogue affirm that the two translations were from the same text, this can only mean that they were not radically divergent. For if any two editions differ so slightly as not to affect the essential points, they can be said to be practically the same text.

Which of the two translations then is the more correct? To this question we cannot give any definite answer as the originals are missing. The first translation has found a more popular acceptance in Japan, and probably also in China, not because it is more faithful to the original, but because a most learned and illustrious Buddhist scholar called Fa tsang 法藏 (A. D. 643-712) wrote a commentary on it. And on that account the commentary is more studied than the text itself. Fa tsang assisted Çikshânda in preparing the second translation, but he preferred the first one for his commentary work, partly because the first one had already found a wide circulation and some commentators before his time, and partly because both translations agreeing in all their important points, he did not like to show his "partiality," as a commentator on Fa tsang says, to the one in the preparation of which he himself took part.

#### OUTLINES OF THE "DISCOURSE ON THE AWAKENING OF FAITH."

I cannot help saying a few words here about the importance of Açvaghosha's main work which is scarcely known in the West, and if so, wrongly. Even Samuel Beal who is considered one of the best authorities on Chinese Buddhism, makes a misleading reference to our author in his *Buddhism in China*. The following quotation from the same apparently shows that at least when he wrote it, 1884, he had a very insufficient knowledge of the subject. He says (p. 138):

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<sup>1</sup>A catalogue of Buddhist books collected in the K'ai yüan period (A. D. 713-741) of the Tung Dynasty, by 契嵩 Chih-shang, A. D. 730. Its full name is "*K'ai yüan shih chiao lu*." Twenty fasciculi.

“His (Açvaghosha's) writings still survive in a Chinese form, and when examined will probably be found to be much tinged by a pseudo-Christian element. . . . But there is one book, the *K'i-sin-lun*, or 'Treatise for Awakening Faith,' which has never yet been properly examined, but, so far as is known, is based on doctrines foreign to Buddhism and allied to a perverted form of Christian dogma.”

Wassiljew, another of the highest Western authorities on the subject, seems to be entirely ignorant of the existence of the present work. It is very strange that those who are considered to be quite well acquainted with the development of the Mahâyânistic thought, do not place in the right light a prominent, if not the principal, actor, who, so far as is known to us, practically initiated this great spiritual and intellectual movement in India. Wassiljew says in his *Buddhismus* (pp. 83-84):

“Zu welcher besonderen Schule Açvaghosha gehörte, wird nicht mit Bestimmtheit überliefert: aus der Legende, nach welcher er sich bei der Abfassung der Vibhâshâ betheiligte, dürfen wir jedoch den Schluss ziehen, dass er zu den Repräsentanten der Vibhâschika's gerechnet ward.”

It is true that in the *Life of Vasubandhu* Açvaghosha is said to have taken part in the compilation of the Vibhâshâ, but it is of no account whatever in the face of the present book in which we can clearly trace almost all elements of the thought fully developed afterwards by Nâgârjuna and other later Mahâyâna representatives.

I wish here, in order to show the significance of Açvaghosha, to call the attention of the reader to the three most salient points in his doctrine which will distinguish him from all Hînayâna schools. The three points constituting the gist of this Çâstra then are: (1) the conception of suchness (*Bhûtatatathatâ*); (2) the theory of the triple personality; (3) the salvation by faith or the Sukhâvati doctrine.

The conception of suchness assumes other names, namely, “The Womb of the Tathâgata” (*Thatâgatagarbha*), when considered from its embracing all possible merits, and the All-Conserving Mind (*Âlaya-vijñâna*), when it becomes the principle of evolution

and is said to have developed from the teaching of Buddha as expounded in the old canonical sutras, such as the *Lankāvatara* and the *Çrīmāla*. Whatever the origin of the idea of suchness might have been, its "absolute aspect" evidently foreshadows the *Çūnyatā* philosophy of the Mādhyamika school. It is very doubtful whether Nāgārjuna, as told in a Chinese tradition, was a personal disciple of Aṣvaghosha, but it is highly probable that he was much influenced by him in forming his system.

The second thesis, the theory of the triple personality, that is one of the most distinctive characteristics of the Mahâyāna Buddhism, seems to have been first established by Aṣvaghosha. The pantheistic idea of suchness (*Bhūtatathatā*), and the religious consciousness which always tends to demand something embodied in infinite love (*karuṇā*) and infinite wisdom (*jñāna*), and the scientific conception of the law of causation regulating our ethical as well as physical world, or in short the doctrine of karma,—these three factors working together in the mind of Aṣvaghosha culminated in his theory of the triple personality.

The doctrine of salvation by faith whereon the Japanese *Shin Shyū* and *Jōdō Shyū* laid down their foundation also, appears first in the present *çāstra*. If the quotation in the Mahâyāna-craddhotpāda actually refers to the Sukhāvatī sūtras, as we may fairly assume, there is a great probability in the statement that during the first four centuries after the Nirvāna there was already a variety of free interpretations about the teaching of the Master, which, commingled with the other religio philosophical thoughts in India, eventually made a full development under the general names of the Mahâyāna and the Hīnayāna schools.

A supplementary point to be noticed in Aṣvaghosha is the abundance of similar thoughts and passages with those in the Bhagavatgīta. The coincidence between the latter and the Saddharma-pundarīka has been pointed out by Kern in his *Buddhismus und seine Geschichte* (Vol. II., p. 500, footnote). While it is an open question which of the two has an earlier date, the Mahâyāna Buddhism as a whole must be permitted to have some common points with the canonical book of Çivaism.

In conclusion I wish to state that as this book, the *Awakening of Faith*, is of paramount importance in its being the first attempt of systematising the fundamental thoughts of the Mahâyâna Buddhism, as well as in its forming a main authority of all the Mahâyânistic schools, those who study the doctrinal history of Buddhism cannot dispense with it; and that, in spite of its highest importance, no attempt has yet been made to make it accessible to the reader who is not familiar with the Chinese language, and so it is my intention to offer to the public an English translation of the entire text.

TEITARO SUZUKI.

LA SALLE, ILL.